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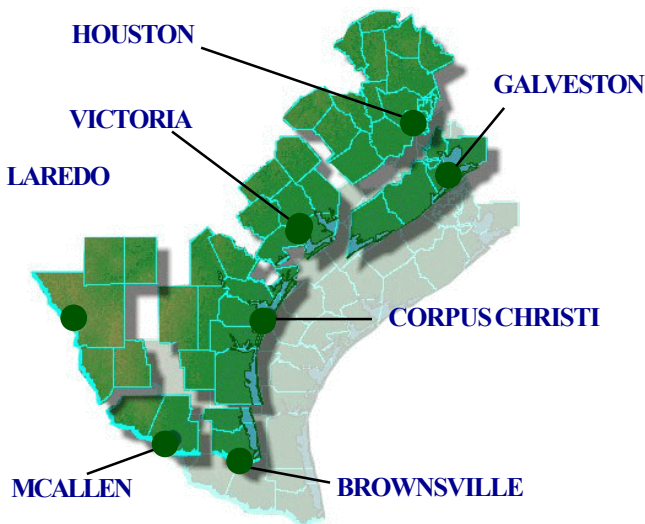


JULY 2001

This edition of the Newsletter features the Corpus Christi division of the Southern District of Texas. The division has one of the world's busiest seaports, the Padre Island National Sea Shore, a federal prison, three Naval Bases and an Army Depot. It is no surprise that the Corpus Christi office manages a large and diverse litigation docket. Corpus Christi also led the district in community-based public safety initiatives with the first Weed and Seed program.

In March, we celebrated the opening of Corpus Christi's beautiful new U.S. Courthouse. In September, our staff will move to new offices at One Shoreline Plaza near the Courthouse.

We are all proud of the exceptional work of the 12 attorneys and 11 support staff members of the Corpus Christi office. The cases highlighted here are a small representation of the important work of the Corpus Christi office.



UNITED STATES COURTHOUSE CORPUS CHRISTI

CORPUS CHRISTI FIREARMS PROSECUTIONS

The Corpus Christi division has a an active docket of violent crimes prosecutions. The cases summarized here represent the types of firearms offenses prosecuted recently.

TEXAS EXILE PROSECUTOR JOINS CORPUS CHRISTI OFFICE

Through the Texas Exile Program, Texas Attorney General John Cornyn and U.S. Attorney Greg Serres appointed Lance Duke as an Assistant Attorney General and a Special Assistant U.S. Attorney. Duke is assigned to the Corpus Christi Office where he will specialize in firearms prosecutions.

BICYCLE ESCAPE ATTEMPT ENDS BADLY FOR ARMED FELON

Corpus Christi Police went to a residence in response to a 911 call concerning an armed man causing a disturbance. When the officers arrived they saw a man leaving the residence on a bicycle. The escape was foiled when the man fell off the bicycle and was knocked unconscious. When Ruben Rodriguez, Jr. woke up, he learned that he was being charged as a felon in possession of a firearm. Rodriguez has a prior felony conviction for sexual assault. He pled guilty and will be sentenced in August. AUSA Ken Cusick.



ARGUMENT LANDS WOMAN IN HOSPITAL, BOYFRIEND IN FEDERAL PRISON

A woman arrived at Spohn Hospital with bullet wounds in both thighs. Corpus Christi police learned that her boyfriend, Stanley LeGard, shot her in the course of an argument. He received 87 months as a felon in possession of a firearm. AUSA: Ken Cusick

HITCH HIKER CATCHES UNANTICIPATED RIDE

Valerio Tovar was hitch hiking when a Bee County Sheriff's deputy stopped and offered him a ride to the county line. The only condition for the ride was if Tovar had no weapons or outstanding warrants. Tovar's response was to pull a gun from his back pocket and point it at the deputy. The deputy shot and disarmed Tovar, and then arrested him. Tovar has three previous convictions on charges including burglary and aggravated rape. At the time of the hitch hiking, Tovar was on parole and required to wear a monitor strapped to his leg to insure he did not leave Corpus Christi. Tovar pled guilty and is scheduled for sentencing in August. AUSA Ken Cusick.

CORPUS CHRISTI BANDIDO CHAPTER OFFICIAL FOUND WITH CACHE OF WEAPONS

Law enforcement officials were looking for Oscar Nieto. Nieto is the Sergeant at Arms and Enforcer for the Corpus Christi Chapter of the Bandidos motorcycle gang. He was also wanted on warrants for drug trafficking. When police and agents arrested him at his apartment in Corpus Christi they found two sawed-off shotguns, a semi-automatic handgun, a revolver, ammunition, numerous knives, marihuana, police scanners, surveillance scopes and computers. Nieto has a lengthy criminal history that began in 1974 and includes arrests for homicide, narcotic violations, firearms offenses, and resisting arrest. Nieto was sentenced to 70 months on the firearms offenses. AUSA Patti Booth.

SOUTH TEXAS ASSET FORFEITURE TASK FORCE TARGETS BULK CURRENCY

This newly formalized working group is comprised of investigators from Texas DPS, Kleberg and Nueces County Sheriffs' Offices, Nueces County District Attorney's Office, FBI, IRS and the U. S. Attorney's Office in Corpus Christi. This task force works with the Texas Coastal Corridor High Intensity Drug Task Force (HIDTA) Initiative and the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) in investigating large-scale narcotics and money laundering organizations. The task force's specialization is identification and forfeiture of illegal assets. The group has already investigated 15 bulk currency cases which resulted in seizure of criminally derived assets totaling over \$6 million.

Recent currency cases include the discovery of nearly \$400,000 by DPS troopers searching a tractor-trailer rig. The truck was headed for McAllen having delivered produce to New York City. Investigation determined that the driver and his passenger were to deliver the cash to a contact in Reynosa, Mexico for a \$15,000 fee. The driver and passenger received instead 4 and 6-year prison sentences. AUSA Patti Booth.

EXPENSIVE TRAFFIC VIOLATIONS

A Kleberg County Sheriff's deputy stopped Jose Reynoso for speeding. The strong odor of fabric softener led the deputy to discover \$273,000 in bulk currency stashed in bundles in the rear seat panels. Reynoso was released on a State bond. Months later a DPS trooper stopped Reynoso in Kingsville for a traffic violation. The trooper found over 40 kilos of marijuana hidden in the support beams of the trailer. Reynoso was prosecuted in Federal Court where he pled guilty. He will be sentenced in July. AUSA Patti Booth.

COLOMBIAN STOWAWAYS WERE DRUG COURIERS

Agents with U.S. Customs, DEA and the Coast Guard boarded a ship traveling from Colombia to Corpus Christi. During the inspection of the ship, two stowaways and nearly 200 kilograms of cocaine were discovered in the ship's rudder housing. Further investigation revealed that both men had been hired by drug traffickers to accompany the drugs from Colombia to the U.S. Both men were sentenced to 144 months. AUSA Jon Muschenheim.

FAYETTE COUNTY CRACK COCAINE:

INVESTIGATION LEADS TO 27 CONVICTIONS

Federal and State warrants for 27 individuals were executed by a task force comprised of the Fayette County Sheriff's Department, Schulenburg PD, FBI and Texas DPS. Twenty-six pled guilty to distribution of crack cocaine. The last defendant, Ronnie Lee Homer, went to trial and was found guilty by a jury. Homer is scheduled for sentencing in August. AUSA Tim Hammer.

CHECK POINT DOGS SNIFF OUT

4 TONS OF MARIJUANA IN TWO TRUCKS

Jose Jimenez drove his rig into the Falfurrias checkpoint pulling a pressurized tanker trailer. The duty dog alerted to one of the tanker's release valves. Jimenez cautioned the agents that if they opened the tanker compartment, they would release harmful chemical vapors. Agents weighed the tanker and found a discrepancy of 3,340 pounds in the empty vehicle weight. They released the pressure and found two tons of marijuana inside the tank. Jimenez pled guilty and was sentenced to 60 months.

Some time later, Venustiano Alvarez pulled his tractor-trailer rig into the same Falfurrias Checkpoint. As he spoke with the agents, the investigative dog started barking at the truck. This led the agents to find that the seal to the trailer doors was broken, the load was incorrectly itemized as hazardous material, and that it was consigned to go to a grocery store at a false address in San Antonio. The cargo was 1700 kilograms of marijuana. A jury found Alvarez guilty. He will be sentenced in July. AUSA Mark Patterson prosecuted both cases.

COAST GUARD AVIATION RESCUE SWIMMER SUNK BY UNDERCOVER DRUG INVESTIGATION

Jason Myers was a U.S. Coast Guard aviation rescue swimmer stationed in Corpus Christi. He jumped into an undercover drug investigation and entered into negotiations to buy wholesale quantities of cocaine.

Investigators recorded Myers in a series of telephone conversations and meetings with undercover officers to arrange for the distribution of 12 kilograms of cocaine. Myers was sentenced to 57 months. AUSA Mark Patterson; AGENCY: FBI, DEA & CCPD.

ENFORCEMENT OF CHILD SUPPORT OBLIGATIONS

Gerald Wilkerson, Jr. was charged in Corpus Christi Federal Court with Failure To Pay Child Support of over \$45,000. He pled guilty to the indictment and was ordered to start paying \$752 each month in back child support. Wilkerson had

been ordered to pay \$400 in child support for two of his children beginning November 1990. AUSA Ken Cusick.

In Houston, Andrew Hoyt was charged with unlawfully failing to pay \$45,000 in past due child support as ordered by a Harris County Court. Hoyt faces up to two years in prison and a fine of \$250,000. AUSA Julie Stern; AGENCY HHS-OIG & Texas AG Office.

Civil Drug Enforcement

The district's commitment to enforce drug laws includes civil enforcement of prescription drug regulations. Recently a Houston pharmacist paid \$75,000 to settle charges of irregularity in dispensing drugs.

CORPUS CHRISTI IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT

Border Patrol Agents equipped with night vision goggles observed a pick-up truck with 15 people packed tightly side-by-side heading north on Highway 281. The undocumented immigrants were returned; two smugglers were convicted and are scheduled for sentencing in July. AUSA Robert Galvan.





This month over 200 children from six Weed & Seed communities are participating in the Drug Education for Youth (DEFY) program at the Naval Air Station in Kingsville. The NAS Kingsville hosted children from Brownsville, Corpus Christi, McAllen, Galveston, Aldine and Richmond. The week-long camp is an integral part of the DEFY program which promotes drug awareness and good citizenship for children ages 10 to 12. The camp curriculum emphasizes substance abuse prevention, conflict management, relationships, citizenship, goal-setting, and self-esteem. Personal health is taught with daily fitness activities and classes on nutrition and substance abuse.

The Newsletter is produced by the Programs Division of the U.S. Attorney's Office. Norma Estimbo-Lacy, Public Affairs Specialist, organizes and edits; Celia Ramirez, Graduate Intern, Sam Houston State University, designs page layout and graphics. Assistant U.S. Attorney John Lenoir has overall editorial responsibility. For more information, comments, or suggestions on this newsletter contact norma.lacy@usdoj.gov.



**U. S. Department of Justice
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